**Learning How to Look**

**Classroom Environment:**

After looking up the demographics of the school I was not at all surprised by what I found. The school is Kindergarten to fourth grade and has around 580 students. The student to teacher ratio is 19.26. Ethnicity wise, the school is 95% white and the other races that make up most of the school are Hispanic or in the category of being two or more races. The grades are very evenly distributed throughout the school with the number of students in each grade. In my Kindergarten class room we have 24 students. The classroom has a very inviting feel and is full of posters, words, number, books and so much more. The students sit in one of four table groups that are distinguished by color. The students have access to computers, iPads, a kitchen, and a bathroom all in their one classroom. The teacher has a very open teaching style. She likes to do a lot of group rotation work because she has a lot of helpers in her room at all times. She also has the kids to a lot of independent work so she can see how each student can work on their own. Lastly, she does some full class learning and tries to bring all of the students together in their learning environment. Overall, she has a classroom that is organized and ran in a very sufficient manner.

**My Beliefs:**

I believe that literacy is one of the most important tools we as humans need to know in order to communicate and function in society. I grew up with a dad as a teacher who stressed writing skills since I can remember. I would read stories all the time, my dad would have me write in a journal, and he would always read over everything I wrote. I was a two-year old kid who was talking like a 12 year old. I could write my whole name by the time I was in pre-school. This alone, in my belief, was because of all the exposure in reading and writing at such a young age. I understand how important it is to teach students the proper literacy skills. I want my classroom to be a place where students can get as much literacy exposure and practice as they can. All of the other subjects are just as important, but specifically teaching students at such a young age, literacy will be a main goal in my classroom. In my classroom there is a little boy who has Aphasia. Aphasia is a language disorder that effects a person’s ability to communicate. Their brain can process information, but getting that information out properly is very difficult. I was surprised by the way the teacher has him focusing on his literacy. He traces words around highlighter and then draws a picture of what he has written. At first I thought that is was not going to be very successful, but I was so wrong. In just the short amount of time I have been in the classroom, not only has his tracing improved; but, his ability to draw accurate pictures has improved drastically as well. It challenges me to think of all the different ways we as teachers are going to have to accommodate for our students. Even being a special education major and knowing all about accommodations, it is still challenging to find what is going to be best for each specific student.

**Organizing a Rich Environment for Learning (Classroom Context):**

During writing instruction the classroom goes through many changes of environment. First the classroom works on their sight word journal independently for about fifteen minutes. While they are working independently, they are also working one-on-one with me doing many different activities. After the time is up the teacher does a whole class mini-lesson or story, then the students work in groups or as a whole class to complete a writing task. The teacher places an electronic timer on the overhead screen so the students know how much time is left for them to focus and complete their tasks. As a class right now, we are working on learning different animals and taking facts from stories to write in an “Animal Fact Journal.” Every other day the teacher reads a book about a specific animal. As a class, she then has them chart (with her) different facts on the specific animal. When they are done learning and organizing, we get into 4 groups and work on writing different factual sentences and then drawing factual pictures. Before this, each student had an opportunity to share a story, then as a class they all wrote about the story and drew a picture. The teacher would draw a picture and model what it should look like for the students. After that, she would give them time to draw. Then as a whole class, they would sound out the words of the story and write them together. With the assignment we just finished with, it was picture first and writing second. With this new assignment students are now given the task to write first then do their picture second. As to my surprise they are doing very well, and have developed the skills they need to be able to do that!

**Understanding How Language & Literacy Develop (Focal Student):**

I have chosen Jace as my focal student. Jace is a student who receives special education services under the category of specific learning disability. He is still being assessed by many individuals to try to figure out what other categories he may fit under and benefit from services. Jace is a student who has aphasia. Aphasia is a language disorder that affects a person’s ability to communicate. He is a very fun and loving boy who gets along well with other classmates. The students in the class accept Jace and do a great job understanding his needs and abilities. Jace has a great relationship with his mom, dad, and his favorite, Papa. His parents and family are very involved in his life and helping him to receive the best education possible. Jace loves to read, play games, eat food, and dance. He loves song time during the day! When he is at home he loves to hang out with his Papa and go buck hunting. Jace also is amazed by the iPad and playing games that involve math pizza. He is very good at math, reading pictures, doing day to day skills (eating, bathroom, handwashing) and playing with his friends at recess. Jace is from a Caucasian family that lives in Clare. They are a family that loves to hunt and be outdoors. My hopes for Jace is that he will continue to work hard to eventually be able to write, speak, or read on his own. With the help of a speech therapist and interventions in the classroom, I have no doubt that Jace will be able to distinguish and properly use some words by the end of this school year.

**Interacting with Children (Focal Student):**

Every time I am in the classroom I have the ability to interact with Jace. I have worked one-on-one with him, as well as helped him with his tracing. Jace likes to be called my “little buddy,” and has attached to me when I am in the classroom. He likes to follow me around when I work with other students and mimic what the other students are writing. I think this is more awesome then and issue because he is engaged and trying very hard to do the right thing. One of the biggest things I have learned about Jace is what makes him happy, and what makes him mad. Since he has trouble communicating, it is very easy for him to get frustrated when he needs or wants something, and then can’t communicate that. I have learned that it is best to ask questions where he can point, or use words he already knows. For example, we were coloring the sky and I asked him “Where is the blue crayon?” He then proceeded to grab the orange crayon and started coloring. I thought about it for a minute then asked him, “Where is the crayon that is the color or the sky?” He then put his orange crayon down, laughed and grabbed the blue one. So, I have learned some specific ways in which to interact with him to get him to work, and work without getting angry. This example explains how important it is to be focused on all of the students. It is also a reminder to not get frustrated when working with a student because they just might need to learn in a different way. In all the interactions I have encountered, most kids work very differently. In my future work, I will take this into consideration and do the best I can to better everyone’s learning abilities.

**Observing or Documenting Children’s Knowledge (Focal Student)**

I took a piece of Jace’s writing and tried to analyze and figure it out. I then had him write a sentence on a piece of paper without tracing and it was a bunch of circles with lines through them. After I asked him to write, I then asked him to draw a picture of his writing. Although for me it was hard to distinguish the picture, he pointed at his pictures and said “buck.” The buck was brown and had some features of an animal. So, this taught me that even though he cannot write letters, he can create a story in his head and develop a proper picture. It leads to understand that he knows language, and can understand language, it is just difficult for him to release his knowledge of language. I also know Jace is very confident when he gets to trace letters and words. He likes to have an adult read words from books, or his own writings (that are traced) so he can try to say them and understand them. Jace is all over the room constantly. He will sit still when it is time to write or work, but as soon as he is finished; he is all over the room grabbing books, or playing with anything that has words on it. He wants attention from the teacher or any helper to have them read what he has. Although it can be distracting at times, I have noticed he learns best when he is moving. For example, there is a song and dance they do that counts to 100. Jace is in the front row doing all the motions and counting the words out loud and loving every second of it. So, even though he has some issues with work and behavior; he does try his best,

**Engaging in Self Evaluation (You):**

My host teacher is awesome at including me as a part of the classroom. She treats me as a teacher which then shows when I am working with the students, because they do the same. I try my best to interact with each student and work on the skills that they are learning in the classroom. I get on their level, try to understand where they are coming from and do the best I can to facilitate in their learning process. What works well is when my instruction is on and one-on-one basis. I think that because I am not in the classroom every day and I don’t know what they are leaning exactly, I learn more doing one-on-one working. I also enjoy small group work as well, because it gives me an opportunity to not only learn more about the students, but to see their progress compared to their classmates. What is not working well is trying to keep the students from wanting to tell me their whole entire life story and get work done at the same time. They know I am new and I don’t know everything about them, so they want to talk to me for 0 minutes about their cat, when it is just taking time out of writing. I do good and having them do in a different direction, but it sometimes gets to a point where they are following me around trying to tell me what they had for breakfast. (It is so cute, though!) I think that literacy is so important, so my time in the classroom really has me focused on what the students need to know, and what they are learning so I can provide the best instruction. I take some of what I learned as a little kid, and try to use those tools on the students as well. I believe that I am also allowing for exploration of multiple literacies. When it is free-write kids can think and write whatever they want. They have also focused on writing stories and are now transitioning to factual writing. So being there to explore that with them is great. It also give me opportunity to talk about the different literacy explorations. I try so hard to really learn everything I can about each student. My host teacher has done a great job and giving me the information I need to know no each student that he or she may not discuss with me. So, kidwatching in my classroom is just a way for me to take an accurate perspective on the kids I am working with and their abilities.  
  
**Using Evaluation to Inform Instruction (You)**

Since I already work so much with my focal student, I think the next step would to really implement a new writing or reading strategy. This would be done with the help of my host teacher and my own personal research. Being a special education major, I think it would benefit me to be able to try to find a tool or new way of instruction for my focal student to try. Doing so, I would want the host teacher to be completely on board with the intervention/instruction that I would be trying to use with Jace. I want to also implement the tracing strategy with Jace, as well as working to decrease the tracing and focus on letter recognition and writing.